

Japan's Shinzo Abe declares a state of emergency

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared a state of emergency to fight new coronavirus infections in major population centres and unveiled a stimulus package he described as among the world's biggest to soften the economic blow.

Abe announced the state of emergency targeting the capital Tokyo and six other prefectures – accounting for about 44 per cent of Japan's population – for a period of about one month.



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared a state of emergency to fight new coronavirus infections. *CREDIT: AP*

“We have decided to declare a state of emergency because we’ve judged that a fast spread of the coronavirus nationwide would have an enormous impact on lives and the economy,” he told Parliament earlier.

His cabinet will also finalize the stimulus package worth 108 trillion yen (\$US990 billion) – equal to 20 percent of Japan’s economic output – to cushion the impact of the epidemic on the world’s third-largest economy.

Abe said direct fiscal spending would amount to 39 trillion yen, or 7 percent of the economy, more than double the amount Japan spent following the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers.

Japan has been spared the big outbreaks of the coronavirus seen in other global hot spots, but a recent, steady rise in infections in Tokyo, Osaka, and other areas led to growing calls for Abe to announce a state of emergency.

Coronavirus infections in Tokyo more than doubled to about 1,200 in the past week, with more than 80 new ones reported on Tuesday, accounting for the highest number in the country.

Nationwide, cases have climbed past 4,000 with 93 deaths as of Monday.

Abe has stressed that the state of emergency will stop short of imposing a formal lockdown as seen in other countries.

The emergency gives governors the authority to call on people to stay at home and businesses to close. With no penalties for ignoring the requests in most cases, enforcement will rely more on peer pressure and respect for authority.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said the city was in talks with the central government to decide what types of facilities it would ask to close or curtail business hours while reiterating there would be no restrictions on buying groceries and medicine.

The government would not ask rail companies to reduce the number of trains in operation, Abe said.

Other essential infrastructure like mail and utilities would operate, as will ATMs and banks, public broadcaster NHK said.

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Taku Eto called on shoppers to stay calm.

“We are asking citizens to buy only what they need when they need it as there is sufficient food supply and no suspension is planned at food factories,” he told reporters, adding there was no sign of disruption to Japan’s grain imports.

Source:

<https://www.watoday.com.au/world/asia/japan-s-shinzo-abe-declares-a-state-of-emergency-20200407-p54hse.html>

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